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28 March 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: C/FE/VNC

**SUBJECT : SAVA Comments on the Draft State Telegram
re "Organizing SVN Body Politic for
National Elections"**

1. We consider the analytic portion of the draft Department of State telegram acceptable as far as it goes but feel that it overlooks at least two critical political factors. On the prescriptive side, however, we cannot subscribe to the solutions recommended for South Vietnam's political ills.



3. In being tidily logical the State draft fails to bring out the crucial point that in the absence of an effective national power structure, regional politicos -- particularly in I Corps -- constitute collectively a group which may not be co-equal with the national structure but, as recent events indicate, could hardly be described as subordinate to it. This central problem is not even identified, let alone addressed, in State's draft.

4. Furthermore, State's catalogue of presently or potentially influential groups omits one of the most significant and, over the longer term, most important: the local and provincial leadership emerging through and from the PAT program.

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5. On the prescriptive side, unpalatable as it may be we have little choice but to accept the fact that it is not for the U.S. to "organize the SVN body politic for national elections". The development of political institutions responsive to their needs, attuned to their traditions, and reflecting current political power realities in South Vietnam is a task the Vietnamese are simply going to have to discharge on their own and in their own way. Within limits we can and should attempt to guide their endeavors, but any U.S. effort "to force feed political development", in our opinion, is doomed from the start. In particular, we must avoid trying to impose on the Vietnamese a political structure (e.g., a two-party system) which we find congenial and with whose operations we are familiar but has no roots in Vietnamese soil.

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6. Some of the specific suggestions in State's draft are worthwhile. When the time comes for national elections, for example, we would indeed be well advised to encourage the Vietnamese to write their electoral laws and regulations in such a fashion as to inhibit the proliferation of splinter parties. The Korean experience which State cites, however, is not directly transferrable to Vietnam. Furthermore, as State's draft itself indicates, it is quite unrealistic to expect present political groups or political figures to coalesce into one or two parties constituted along what are actually the lines of the old CDNI in Laos.

7. Political development within South Vietnam is obviously something in which the U.S. has a great stake. Our interests can be best served, however, if we resolutely control our ineradicable American instinct to stage manage and to cast other people's political evolution in our institutional image. Despite its obvious weakness and fragility, the type of program which the GVN has already enunciated -- a constitutional convention producing a constitution laying out the ground rules for elections which are then held to develop a civilian government -- holds more promise for real success than any externally directed effort to create an artificial two-party system. This is the type of process with which we will almost certainly have to live. We will stand a far better chance of influencing the course of its development at each stumbling stage if we work with it and do not endeavor to scrap it for something else of our own invention.

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CVR/ANP

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